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## The (inter)cultural turn in foreign language teaching

Prue Holmes

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Since Byram, Gribkova and Starkey's (2002) publication "Developing the Intercultural Dimensions of Language Teaching", the focus on the "intercultural" in language teaching has strengthened further. The challenge for language teachers is to recognize and respond to this focus. Language learning policy and curricula now include the intercultural dimension of language teaching. But implementing this intercultural turn in their classrooms is not easy for language teachers, especially as governments and education ministries emphasise the need for teachers to meet school/national based criteria in pupil performance. Further, language teachers themselves need to be interculturally aware, in terms of understanding their own culture and identity and their intercultural competence, in order to successfully teach the intercultural dimension (see, for example, Bastos & Araújo e Sá, 2013; Pihno, 2013; Sercu, 2005).

However, the focus in this chapter is not to explore how to develop teachers' intercultural competence, but rather, how teachers can develop it in their learners. Drawing on the liberal educational philosophy embodied in language teaching in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and characterised by Humboldt's notion of *Bildung*, Byram (2008) argues that language teachers—through their teaching of interculturality—are well placed to encourage learners to take action, together with others, and engage in democratic inquiry. According to the CEFR (2001, p. 3), language teaching is a means of ensuring that the population more widely can "achieve a wider and deeper understanding of the way of life and forms of thought of other peoples and of their cultural heritage". This broader aim can be achieved through developing in learners intercultural awareness, and developing their intercultural (communicative) competence (Byram, 1997)<sup>1</sup>. The concepts embodied in intercultural competence include knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and (critical cultural) awareness—the ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries. As such, the learner performs the role of intercultural mediator/speaker, someone who is aware of differences and similarities, is sensitive towards others and the culture in which they reside, and is also aware of his/her own (cultural) positioning, and as a result of this awareness, takes action.

Further, Levine and Phipps (2012) argue that language teachers need emergent and critical conceptual tools to move beyond "a heavily skills-based approach". They advocate a critical approach to language pedagogy which invites teachers and students to unpack, examine, contest, and transform taken-for-granted assumptions that are ingrained in language programme direction, curricular, and teaching practices.

With these goals in mind, three key challenges emerge: how to develop learners' intercultural communication and competence to enable them to manage intercultural encounters; how to build learners' identities so they can understand and know themselves in order to better know and understand others; and third, how to develop intercultural citizens who are able to take action against social injustice, inequality, and misrepresentation in contexts of intercultural engagement. In

this chapter I attempt to address these challenges and present some examples of possible activities and pedagogies/approaches (e.g., online learning) which offer teachers ways of developing learners' intercultural understanding and competence. The approaches involve learners in experiential learning, and processes of comparison, analysis, reflection, and cooperative action in order to build learners' intercultural capabilities in response to the intercultural turn.

### **Identity and culture**

A more recent intercultural turn in language education draws attention to the socially constructed nature of intercultural communication. First, learners need to need to understand the social and communicative processes that underpin constructions of culture and identity, and this entails that they understand their own identity and culture in order to understand others. This communicative view of language learning challenges essentialised and nationalistic views of culture—as in “culture as a Big C” (through the study of national literatures, countries, histories, etc) and the “three Ps” (of products, practices, and perspectives). Instead, there is a shift towards the “five Cs” (context, cultures, comparisons, connections, communities) where language learning is focused on intercultural communication (US Universities National Standards of Foreign Language Education Project, 2006). Language learning is no longer about food, festivals, facts, and flags, but understanding culture as a social construction: learners are encouraged to understand how culture—their own and that of others—permeates and shapes behaviour, interactions and language choices. It also requires an understanding of their own identity, and that of others, in this (intercultural) communicative process.

This conceptualisation of culture focuses on activity. Thus, if “culture” is treated as a verb, that is, “to culture” or “to do Culture X”, then its status changes from an entity to a process (Street, 1993; cited in Piller, 2011). Thus, Piller argues that an essentialist view of culture, which assumes that people in “Culture X” behave in some predicted and preconceptualised way, is transformed into a social constructionist one, which “treats culture as something people do or which they perform” (p.15). For example, my stereotypical view that Finnish people use a lot of silence in communication is reconstructed when I engage in “getting to know” conversation and information exchange and I realise that silence is not part of this activity, but that my interlocutor and I negotiate communication strategies of greeting and information sharing. We can say, then, that individuals, through their everyday situated communication with others, (re)construct and (re)negotiate their identities. This identity formation may be the result of communication among people in their own local group(s), or with people who are from other horizons (as in the case of my Finnish interlocutor and I). Cultural stereotypes of the other, a process described as “otherising”, while providing a starting point for understanding others, are contested and challenged in intercultural communication. I am left feeling that my cultural stereotype of Finnish people as “quiet” and communing in silence is erroneous, unhelpful and inadequate.

Therefore, the language teacher's task is to find ways of encouraging students to recognise and confront stereotypes and quickly move beyond them. The following activity provides a way of exploring the complexity of identity, and hence, the limitations of stereotypes.

#### **Activity 1: Understanding complexity in identity**

Teachers can ask students to analyse their own identity to understand its complexity, discussing their understanding in pairs (either providing a range of terms in the language of study, or asking students to identify the language required):

1. Write down your answer to these two questions: Who am I (i.e., how do I see myself; what identities do I portray to others)? How do others see me (i.e., what identities do others give to me)? Students can then discuss their answers in pairs.
2. Next, write down a list of all the different types of identities you can think of (e.g., family, national, linguistic, social, cultural, historical, personal, professional, local/regional, geographical, political, religious, racial, transnational/European/cosmopolitan, ethnic, hybrid, hyphenated, etc.).
3. Discuss your list with your partner's. Add any new identities and terms to your list.
4. Discuss the nature of these identities and how they differ, giving examples of each. Are there any others you can think of?
5. Which of the following words would you use to describe the nature of your identity? Static, expansive, flowing, definite, solid, finite, singular, blurry, fragmented, fluid, changing, linear, organic, fixed, bounded, multiple, unified, flexible.

Teachers can follow up by explaining that identity labels like “national/cultural identity,” “individualist/collectivist” are problematic because they fix the identity of an individual, thus leading to essentialised understandings of others in a process known as “otherisation” (Holliday, Hyde & Kullman, 2005). As Hall, Evans & Nixon (2013) argue, how we project ourselves and the cultural identities we ascribe to ourselves have become more open-ended, variable, and problematic such that identities have become contradictory, continuously shift about, and pull individuals in different directions. Chimamande Adichie’s “Danger of a single story” narration on *YouTube* provides an excellent example of this Nigerian post-colonial writer’s examination of her own experiences of being “otherised” by non-Nigerians (<http://youtu.be/D9Ihs241zeg> ).

In order to explore the concept of culture teachers must construct tasks that engage learners in intercultural communication, which involves a process of comparison and contrast between their own socially constructed world and that of the other; learners reflect on knowledge of their own language and culture as well as that of the other. Cultural mapping (Activity 2) enables learners to understand the complexity of their culture and identity beyond essentialised understandings of culture.

#### Activity 2:

1. Ask learners to plot the following on a piece of paper: who you are (name, origins, languages spoken); where you come/came from; what is important to you; who is important to you (now, from the past); how you see yourself; how others see you.
2. Next, ask learners to discuss how concepts of culture, history, politics, languages, power, and context are present on their maps (either individually or in pairs). Looking back to the identity labels developed in Activity 1 might be useful here. How have these representations changed over time?
3. Then ask them to consider how these concepts form their understanding of their own identity. To what extent might their cultural map influence how they communicate with others as they move in and out of different contexts and groups? (They may be able to make links to the dynamic nature of their own identity and cultural understanding as they consider

these intercultural communicative processes.) Further, ask learners how communication channels (e.g., face to face, mediated, dialogic, virtual) influence how they communicate with others.

Then follow up with an examination of the “Iceberg” model of culture (Appendix 1).

4. Ask learners to draw on the terms to find examples or representations of aspects of their own culture.
5. Thinking back to activity 1, ask learners to reflect on how static these terms are. In other words, do they always project these identities, or behave in these ways, or are there times when they prefer to disregard these unwritten rules of their culture? Do they know of others in their group/culture who disregard or abandon these values/behaviours? Why? In what ways are some of these behaviours being reconstructed and renegotiated over time/with influences of transnational movements and globalisation, etc.?

Together, these two activities begin to illustrate to learners the extent to which identity and culture are complex and dynamic terms, and may be reconstructed and renegotiated as individuals engage in (intercultural) communication with others.

### **Self, other, language, and culture in the intercultural turn: Intercultural encounters**

In the act of intercultural communication (and learning), learners are engaged in interpreting self (intraculturality) and other (interculturality). Learners are expanding language through a process of languaging which is dynamic, personal, expressive and creative, with no fixed boundaries (Shohamy, 2006; cited in Scarino, 2011). They tell stories of themselves and others, and their selves are constructed by and through the various discourses that give meaning to their lives, beyond the dualities of national languages (L1-L2) and national cultures (C1-C2). As Kramsch (2011) argues, this communication of the symbolic self, “the most sacred part of our personal and social identity, . . . demands for its well-being careful positioning, delicate facework, and the ability to frame and re-frame events” (p. 354).

She argues that “this symbolic dimension of intercultural competence calls for an approach to research and teaching that is discourse-based, historically grounded, aesthetically sensitive, and that takes into account the actual, the imagined and the virtual worlds in which we live” (p. 354). For example, online learning tools enable learners to engage in online or face-to-face interactions where they can construct “their own and others’ subject positions through the questions they ask and the topics they choose to talk about or to avoid” (Kramsch, 2013, p. 68)<sup>2</sup>. Intercultural communication activities must therefore reflect learning about oneself—self identity—as much as about others’ identities.

Language learning activities are beginning to reflect this approach, in particular, in a growing shift towards intercultural encounters as the focus of intercultural competence development (Barrett, Byram, Lázár, Mompoin-Gaillard & Philippou, 2013, in press). Intercultural encounters take place when two or more people interact in situations where they perceive each other to have different cultural backgrounds or come from different horizons—they are from different countries, regions, religions, ethnicities—and when these differences are salient and affect the nature of the interaction (Barrett et al., 2013). They involve a delicate process of face work and identity negotiation. They also involve processes of preparation, engagement, evaluation of performance (one’s own and that of

the other) and reflection in an ongoing cyclical process (Holmes, 2010; 2012)<sup>3</sup>. The following activity facilitates this process of intercultural learning.

### Activity 3: Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters

The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (AIE) (Council of Europe, 2009) is a widely recognised, useful tool in developing learners' awareness of self in relation to the other, encouraging learners to think about both differences and similarities between themselves and their interlocutor, and importantly, inviting them to consider what action may result from the encounter. The activity is informed by theories of intercultural competence (namely, that of Byram, 1997). The description of key terms and concepts underpinning intercultural communication (available on the AIE website [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/default_en.asp)) enables teachers to introduce language learners to the important concepts of intercultural communication in intercultural encounters. The AIE has two ready-to-use formats, one for adults and one for younger learners. The AIE takes learners through a series of prompts, inviting them to describe the context of the encounter, who said what to whom, when, and where; the prompts also invite learners to reflect on the encounter—how they felt about the encounter, how the other experienced the encounter, and what action they will take, if at all, as a result of the encounter.

The AIE is soon to be complemented by the “Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters through Visual Media” (AIEVM), designed to establish how visual media (e.g., television, the Internet, film, photography, drama, street theatre, art, etc.) create in people an awareness of otherness. The AIEVM will be a welcome addition to so-defined “monolingual” learning contexts where there appears to be less opportunity for overt intercultural communication in the community.

### **Pedagogies of online learning to facilitate the development of intercultural competence**

Pedagogies of online learning, or telecollaboration, are opening up further opportunities for teachers to engage learners across regions and countries in authentic, purposeful and (a)synchronous intercultural exchange. Many secondary schools have benefited from networks such as etwinning (<http://www.etwinning.net>) and ePals (<http://www.epals.com/>) to bring learners into contact with partner classes. The following two studies provide specific examples that illustrate the potential for teachers and learners.

#### Example 1: Intercultural communication across four European countries

Lazar (2013, in press) describes a collaboration among teachers in four European countries that involves learners in telecollaboration over five months. In mixed teams they discussed and reflected on a variety of topics in order to get to know each other's multiple perspectives: for example, typical meals and table manners; selecting, discussing and then translating popular songs; presenting themselves and their cities. The online platform, MOODLE, was used to upload texts, pictures, and documents; and MOODLE resources such as discussion forums, journals, wikis, and live chat sessions supplemented the pedagogy. The outcomes indicated improved intercultural competence by the end of the project with the majority of the students feeling that they benefited from working together online.

#### Example 2: Developing culture-general awareness in a monolingual/monocultural classroom via wikis

A further example involves the use of a wiki project to develop general cultural awareness (Trejo & Fay, 2013, in press). Less ambitious in its aims, this project draws on the use of wikis among learners in the monolingual context of a Mexican classroom. Using critical incidents, Trejo and Fay used critical incidents as the prompt for student engagement, but teachers could also use problematic dialogues, scenarios, case studies, etc. They invited their learners to engage in the following seven steps: post reactions to and reflections on the issues presented in the critical incidents; brainstorm topics for further research (in the target language) related to the critical incident (e.g., one group explored practices around marriage proposals in Iran to find out how a British male might inform his Iranian fiancé's father of their marriage intentions); use the outcomes of this research to revisit initial responses and to further discuss them collectively; publish their responses on the wiki; form groups to further share ideas via the wiki; present their group understanding to other groups; and finally, as a class, explore the issues as they might play out in the Mexican context.

These two examples illustrate the enjoyment learners derived from meaningful engagement via technology, in both intercultural and monocultural/monolingual contexts.

### **Further methods/approaches to developing intercultural communicative competence**

In addition to telecollaboration, there are a variety of other approaches and pedagogies that have been developed by teachers and researchers and embedded in learner experience, to develop learners' intercultural (communicative) competence. (Some of these approaches have been summarised from Barrett et al., 2013, in press, and are explained in more detail there.)

#### CLIL

The adoption of content language and integrated learning (CLIL) is developing in Europe, and offers opportunities for intercultural learning and engagement. Marsh and Langé (2000, p. 1; cited in Byram, 2008) describe CLIL as "a generic term [which] refers to any educational situation in which an additional language, and therefore not the most widely used language of the environment, is used for the teaching and learning of subjects other than the language itself". The following four concepts that embody CLIL suggest ways of building intercultural competence through language: *content* - progression in knowledge, skills and understanding related to specific elements of a defined curriculum (i.e., culture learning through history, geography, literature, languages); *communication* – using language to learn while learning to use language; *cognition* – developing thinking skills which link concept formation (abstract and concrete), understanding and language, (e.g., via the five *savoirs* in Byram's intercultural competence model); and *culture* – exposure to alternative perspectives and shared understandings which deepen awareness of otherness and self (e.g., through intercultural interaction) (adapted from Byram, 2008). To this end, Byram is leading a project, where a network of teachers (belonging to Durham University's Cultnet) are producing language learning activities that combine a "CLIL" classroom concept with a citizenship education model designed to develop learners' civic responsibility, action taking skills, and intercultural competence (in particular, critical cultural awareness). The outcome is a proposed book publication which will be a valuable resource for language teachers.

#### Activities that invite multiple perspectives

These activities invite learners to discuss their own and the other's perspective in a process of decentring, and comparison and contrast, followed by further reflection and possibly action. Stories and biographies are useful here in enabling learners to consider how diversity, and social and

historical contexts of individuals' experience influenced events and trajectories in their lives. Maps showing different projections enable learners to discuss viewpoints that are commonly accepted and those less customary.

#### Role plays, simulations and drama

These enable learners to take on new identities as they solve a problem, carry out a task, or discuss an issue according to the norms of the assumed role. Learners can experience first-hand strangeness, criticism, and exclusion. Post-discussion enables learners to experience marginalisation, difference, and deconstruct stereotypes about and ethnocentric positions towards others.

#### Films, texts, theatre, poetry and creative writing

Watching films and plays and reading plays, poems, and other texts allows learners to learn about people they have never met and lives they have never imagined. Through creative writing they can reconstruct the narrative from their own perspective. Such activities can prompt reconsideration of taken-for-granted attitudes, stereotypes, and even encourage learners to understand how society can protect the dignity and human rights of people with whom they might never have contact.

#### Ethnography

Learners can conduct "fieldwork" outside the classroom by recording (using an observation grid) verbal and non-verbal communication of others, and explore how people express emotions such as respect, gratitude, anger. Learners can also "interview" other community members and neighbours to find out their perspectives on community issues. Learners can compare and contrast results in the classroom, reflecting on their own values, attitudes, and communication skills.

#### Social media (chat rooms, public for a), teleconferencing, and online tools

Carefully moderated and guided, these tools offer learners opportunities to engage in real time communication and also expose their own "voice". Facilitated and guided reflection can help learners to consider their own attitudes, perspectives, and even miscommunication, when faced with ambiguity, and to confront these through experience of and reflection on their intercultural communication with another. O'Dowd's (2007) book provides a useful exploration of how teachers can use telecollaboration with their learners. And Deverotte and Leeds-Hurwitz (2013, in press) explore the use of online technologies in constructing conditions for intercultural dialogue between language teachers and learners.

#### **Assessment**

A final brief mention is necessary regarding assessment. How and whether to assess intercultural competence remains a contentious issue with no clear-cut resolutions. Educational regimes require that learning is assessed, and learners are assessment driven in their choices about whether and what to learn. Attempts to manage assessment have been addressed through the development of scales (e.g., INCA, CEFR) and inventories (e.g., FREPA/CARAP) of intercultural competence which are readily available for teachers' use on the respective websites. Scarino (2010) raises several problems in trying to assess intercultural competence, or using her term, "intercultural capabilities": How can it be assessed when it involves values? What constitutes evidence of its development? How do teachers judge it? Should it be assessed? She suggests an interpretive/meaning making approach which includes an ongoing process of enquiry, of data gathering and analysis of teachers' and learners' understandings of learners' learning, and each teaching/learning experience affords



teachers and learners with another experience to better understand the complexity of teaching, learning, and assessing intercultural competence.

However, in the current secondary school context, assessment still remains a challenging task for teachers.

### **Implications and conclusions**

The complexity of developing intercultural competence in learners, and the wide variety of approaches and pedagogies available, offer potential for language teachers in the classroom. Theoretical developments in intercultural competence and intercultural education for citizenship highlight the limitations of approaches that reify culture as knowledge of facts, food, festivals, and flags. As I have illustrated, such knowledge is unhelpful in enabling individuals to (i) engage in real-time communication, whether in their own language or in that of another person; (ii) interpret and understand others' behaviours, communication, and interactions; and/or (iii) solve (intercultural communication) problems.

The goals implied in these new directions may seem ambitious within the context of the language classroom as learners grapple with developing linguistic knowledge and communicative competence. They raise significant and important challenges for language teachers. However, teachers, too, can contribute to understandings and processes of developing intercultural communication and competence in their learners. By examining their assumptions and reflecting on practice, they can theorise about their own language pedagogy/learning as they respond to the intercultural turn. (For examples of teacher-led research see the special issue edited by Byram, Holmes & Savvides, 2013, in press; Hawkins, 2011; Tsau & Houghton, 2010; Witte & Harden, 2011). Moreover, not all learners' everyday experiences are characterised by post-modernity; language teachers must also find methods of developing intercultural competence within contexts that are seemingly monolingual/monocultural, yet simultaneously preparing learners for likely intercultural engagement in the future.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Language teachers can read more about practical guidelines and tools for implementing this aim in the Council of Europe's (2010) document *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education* by Jean-Claude Beacco, Michael Byram, Marisa Cavalli, Daniel Coste, Mirjam Egli Cuenat, Francis Goullier and Johanna Panthier (Language Policy Division), [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Source2010\\_ForumGeneva/GuideEPI2010\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Source2010_ForumGeneva/GuideEPI2010_EN.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See Kramsch 2013 for a review of the development of the concept "culture" in language education.

<sup>3</sup> These two studies describe a pedagogy of intercultural encounters and how to develop learners awareness and processes of evaluation of their own intercultural competence through the ongoing cyclical process drawing on the PEER (prepare, engage, evaluate, reflect) model.

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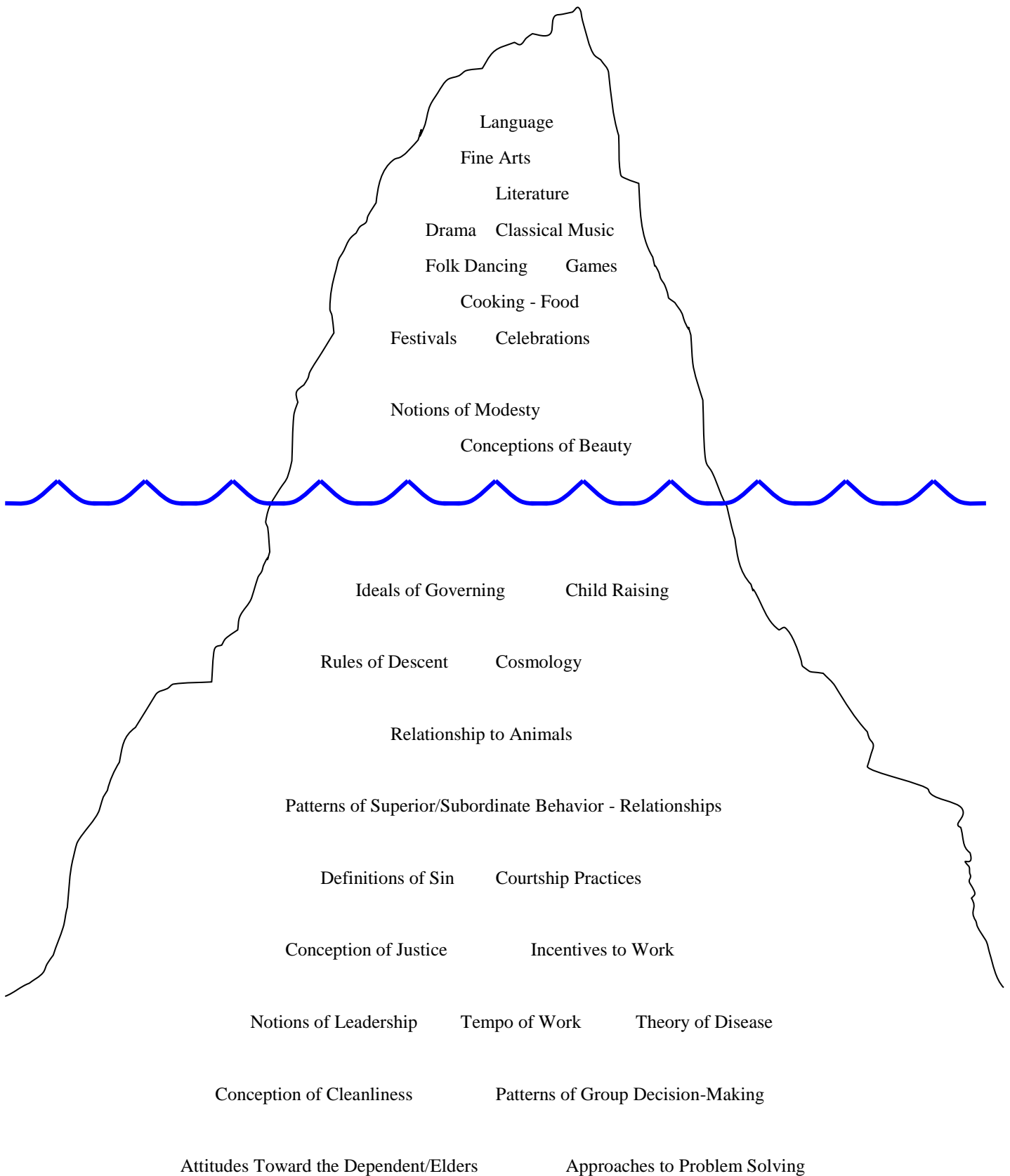
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## Appendix: The “Iceberg” theory of culture

### Iceberg Theory of Culture



Eye Contact Behavior	Conception of Status Mobility	Conception of Past and Future
Roles in Relation to Age, Sex, Class, Occupation, Kinship, and So Forth		Definition of Insanity
Conversational Patterns in Various Social Contexts	Nature of Friendship	Ordering of Time
Preference for Competition or Cooperation	Body Language	Social Interaction Rate
Notions of Adolescence	Notions about Logic and Validity	Patterns of Handling Emotions
Facial Expressions	Arrangements of Physical Space	AND MUCH, MUCH MORE...

**Just as nine-tenths of the iceberg is out of sight and below the water line, so is nine-tenths of culture out of conscious awareness. The out-of-awareness part of culture has been termed deep-culture.**

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